

March 7, 2013

Dear Members of Senate Health Policy:

The Religious Liberty and Conscience Protection Act, Senate Bill 136, is a mechanism to ignore the beliefs of patients, infringe on the doctor patient relationship, and an egregious assault of the principle of health insurance coverage in this country—giving employers, facilities and health insurance companies carte blanche over peoples' access to basic health care.

The legislation allows employers, facilities and health insurance companies to refuse to provide coverage for any essential health care service that they object to on the basis of religious beliefs or moral convictions. That means employers, facilities and insurance companies can not only deny access to abortion, but that they can deny access to any health care service, including birth control, HIV/AIDS treatment, vaccines, mammograms, cancer screenings or maternity care.

Right now, women who are survivors of sexual assault are not always provided with access to or information on emergency contraception. When a woman is raped and rushed to the hospital the last thing on her mind should be if the hospital will be able to provide her adequate care and birth control to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

SB 136 is not limited to religiously-affiliated entities. Any university would be able to deny access to any service including: comprehensive counseling services, sexual education services, birth control, STD testing and treatment. Moreover, any employer or health plan issuer can claim an exemption based on this vague and harmful standard. For instance, an owner of a business franchise could refuse to provide coverage for any essential or preventive health care service that they claim an objection to.

Senate Bill 136 creates a giant loophole that undermines the whole notion of comprehensive health care and health insurance. Health insurance coverage is rooted in the principle of shared risk and shared protection and SB 136 dismantles the very concept of health insurance by allowing health insurance companies, facilities and employers to take coverage away from people, even for the most basic health care.

Senate Bill 136 would eviscerate important protections for Michigan families. By allowing employers, facilities and health insurance companies to refuse coverage for any health care service, SB 136 would take these important protections away from Michigan families. SB 136 takes medical decision making out of the hands of patients and doctors and gives them to employers without offering any protections for employees and families to get the care they need.

Michigan families deserve quality health care, no matter where they work and where they seek care. Senate Bill 136 is designed to undermine this core principle and would represent an enormous step backwards for thousands of Michigan families.

Sincerely,



Meghan Groen  
Director of Government Relations